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*Cross Slab Monuments in the Late Middle Ages:
Patronage, Production, and Locality
in Northern England*

ALEKSANDRA McCLAIN

When the commemorative practices of the later Middle Ages are considered, the stone cross slab grave marker is rarely the monumental form that first springs to mind. Rather, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are manifestly associated with the establishment of brasses and sculpted effigies as the premier products of the medieval funerary monument industry. It is perhaps understandable, especially given the art historical nature of much commemorative scholarship, that studies of the elaborate and evocative figural representations of the medieval populace have taken precedence. Nevertheless, the aesthetically unassuming cross slab has much to reveal, not only about the production, distribution, and consumption of commemorative monuments in the fourteenth century, but also about the medieval social milieu which drove their creation and utilisation.

This paper will explore the production and use of late-medieval cross slab grave covers through a detailed typological study and spatial analysis of the monuments of the North Riding of Yorkshire in the fourteenth century.¹ The patterns of distribution and stylistic features of monuments from the sample area will be contextualised through comparison with contemporary cross slab data from other northern counties, and with what is known of brasses and effigial sculpture in the region. The systematic, archaeological approach undertaken here emphasises that the value of monuments is not as anecdotal examples or isolated pieces of art, but as a corpus of data that can be examined over time and space, at large and small scales, and at regional and local levels. The monuments must be considered in the context of the churches, settlements, and localities in which they were erected, and with reference to the political, economic, and social developments of the period. As active, dynamic, and communicative components of material culture, cross slabs would have been equally significant to prestigious figural brasses,

¹ A. N. McClain, 'Patronage, Power, and Identity: the Social Use of Local Churches and Commemorative Monuments in Tenth to Twelfth-Century North Yorkshire', unpublished PhD thesis (York, 2005); A. N. McClain, 'Medieval Cross Slabs in the North Riding of Yorkshire: Chronology, Distribution, and Social Implications', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* (hereafter *YAJ*), 79 (2007), pp. 155–93.

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tombs, and effigies in the social and spiritual life of medieval England. Indeed, in northern regions of the country they can be argued to have had an even greater impact, as they were in use over a longer period of time, were located at considerably more sites, and would have been patronised, engaged with, and understood by a wider range of social groups.

The Definition and Development of Medieval Cross Slabs

Definitions

The term ‘cross slab grave cover’, while in general scholarly use, is actually a somewhat simplified appellation for a monumental form which in reality encompasses a remarkable range of shapes, styles, and motifs. They can be recumbent or standing, large or small, coped or flat, incised or carved in relief, and decorated with a variety of abstract or representational designs, but ‘cross slab’ has become the common designation because the vast majority of these monuments are recumbent, non-effigial, and decorated with a central cross. Almost 80% of the monuments in the North Riding precisely fit this description, but 12.5% of the monuments included in this survey have no cross at all. Of these, some slabs are blank or just have simple mouldings, some feature geometric patterns, some amalgamate aspects of the cross with other motifs, and on some the cross has been replaced entirely with another emblem. Also, in a few cases the boundaries are blurred between grave slabs, effigial sculpture, incised slabs, and brasses. Some monuments feature crudely carved heads or even low-relief bodies in addition to their crosses and other motifs, and others display a brass inscription plate or inlaid letters in addition to the otherwise conventionally carved cross design.

For the purposes of the analysis undertaken here, fully sculpted effigies have not been included in the dataset, nor have monuments which are solely brasses or brass indents, even if in the shape of a cross. This distinction has been drawn because, quite apart from stylistic differences, there appears to be a fundamental distinction in the modes of production between cross slabs and other monuments in northern England. In Yorkshire, brasses do not occur in considerable numbers until the second half of the fourteenth century, around three hundred years after the cross slab tradition begins.² Similarly, the earliest full effigies in Yorkshire appear long after cross slabs were established. The earliest is the imported Purbeck marble monument of Archbishop Walter de Gray (d. 1255) in York Minster, which dates from the early 1260s, but the earliest locally produced effigies emerge at least

² S. Badham, *Brasses from the North East: a Study of Brasses Made in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Durham, and Northumberland in the Pre-Reformation Period* (London, 1979); S. Badham, ‘Monumental Brasses: the Development of the York Workshops in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries’, in C. Wilson (ed.), *Medieval Art and Architecture in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions, 9 (Leeds, 1989), pp. 165–85, at p. 166.

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twenty years later.³ Also, semi-effigial slabs in the north generally date to the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries or later, generally post-dating the introduction of full effigial sculpture. They are therefore the result of the amalgamation of established effigial motifs with the cross slab form, rather than serving as a transitional type in a linear chronology between cross slabs and sculpted effigies.

Furthermore, when the brass and effigy industries did develop, they contrasted substantially with the rural, small-scale, and highly localised production which broadly characterises northern cross slabs.⁴ Brass workshops were an almost entirely urban industry, with York the primary production centre in the north.⁵ While effigy production was probably rural in nature, workshops were often based at major quarries (e.g. near Tadcaster) or monastic sites, where the highly skilled masons needed for such carving would be in demand.⁶ In the North Riding there is some evidence for rural or small-scale production of effigies outside major workshops, but it is not substantial. There is a knightly effigy in the Saltmarshe chapel at Howden dating to c.1320, which ties in with no other known workshop series, and seems to have been commissioned in a gap between major York workshop production phases.⁷ There is also a larger group of ten mid-fourteenth-century monuments based around Ingleby Arncliffe, with a small distribution network primarily in the rural north-east of Yorkshire. Although the larger group of monuments and the distribution pattern suggest it could be an established provincial workshop, it is more likely that the monuments, which were all produced over a very short period of time, can be attributed to travelling masons who were temporarily stationed at nearby Gisborough Priory.⁸ On the whole, there is little evidence to link the production of cross slabs in northern areas with the same workshops that produced either brasses or effigies.⁹

³ M. J. Sillence, 'The Two Effigies of Archbishop Walter de Gray (d. 1255) at York Minster', *Church Monuments*, 20 (2005), pp. 5–30, at p. 13; S. Badham and G. Blacker, *Northern Rock: the Use of Egglestone Marble for Monuments in Medieval England* (Oxford, 2009), p. 23.

⁴ N. Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation* (Oxford, 2009), p. 62.

⁵ Badham and Blacker, *Northern Rock*, pp. 27–28.

⁶ Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 65; Badham and Blacker, *Northern Rock*, p. 24.

⁷ S. Badham, B. Gittos, and M. Gittos, 'The Fourteenth-Century Monuments in the Saltmarshe Chapel at Howden, Yorkshire: Their History and Context', *YAJ*, 68 (1996), pp. 113–55, at p. 126. Mark Downing has noted that the effigy may not be local. It could be a product of out-of-county sculptors, as it has parallels to work on military effigies at Calder Abbey (Lancashire): see p. 73 of this volume.

⁸ B. Gittos and M. Gittos, 'The Ingleby Arncliffe Group of Effigies: a Mid-Fourteenth Century Workshop in North Yorkshire', *Church Monuments*, 17 (2002), pp. 14–38, at pp. 14, 26.

⁹ S. Badham, 'Evidence for the Minor Funerary Monument Industry 1100–1500', in K. Giles and C. Dyer (eds), *Town and Country in the Middle Ages: Contrasts, Contacts and Interconnections, 1100–1500* (Leeds, 2005), pp. 165–95, at p. 184.

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More difficult to classify are those monuments which have been traditionally identified as ‘incised slabs’, as – like most cross slabs – they are recumbent and do not feature sculpture in the round.¹⁰ Indeed, many of F. A. Greenhill’s earliest ‘incised slabs’ would be categorised simply as cross slabs in this survey. Similarly, a number of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century slabs, classed by Sally Badham and Malcolm Norris as belonging to the London-based Ashford and Basyng series of incised slabs, are essentially later versions of the Purbeck marble cross slabs that had been produced by the Corfe workshops from the second half of the twelfth century. However, they also feature incised lettering which ties their production to the monumental brass workshops of London.¹¹ In the late-medieval period, the distinction between cross slabs and incised slabs becomes somewhat clearer, primarily because of the introduction of effigial representations. Incised slabs of this period are mostly very large, elaborate floor slabs that feature effigies, inscriptions, canopies and other architectural embellishments, and they bear little typological resemblance to cross slabs of any period. Furthermore, their production in some areas is closely affiliated with major brass and alabaster workshops, rather than with local production.¹²

Nevertheless, there are some notable exceptions to this rule. In West Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, there are a number of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century incised slabs with crosses that are only distinguished from ‘normal’ cross slabs by the fact that they are almost always finely carved, have exceptionally elaborate head designs, and have an inscription panel, which is most often similar to the marginal inscriptions found on many effigial incised slabs.¹³ In addition, a relatively crude fifteenth-century incised slab from Tickhill (West Riding of Yorkshire) has recently been discovered, which features a fine cross with two awkwardly drawn effigies and simple canopies. Peter Ryder has argued that the good workmanship of the cross, as well as stylistic links to cross slabs at two nearby churches, indicate that the sculptor was used to working on cross slabs, and that some incised slabs may have been produced by local cross slab sculptors, independently of workshops.¹⁴

¹⁰ F. A. Greenhill, *The Incised Slabs of Leicestershire and Rutland* (Leicester, 1958); F. A. Greenhill, *Incised Effigial Slabs: a Study of Engraved Stone Memorials in Latin Christendom, c. 1100 to c. 1700* (London, 1976); F. A. Greenhill, *Monumental Incised Slabs in the County of Lincoln* (Newport Pagnell, 1986); S. Badham and M. Norris, *Early Incised Slabs and Brasses from the London Marblers* (London, 1999).

¹¹ Badham and Norris, *Early Incised Slabs*, pp. 8, 24–26.

¹² Badham and Norris, *Early Incised Slabs*, p. 13; J. Crease, “‘Not Commonly Reputed or Taken for a Saint’: the Output of a Northern Workshop in the Late Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries”, this volume, pp. 154–56, below.

¹³ Greenhill, *Incised Slabs in the County of Lincoln*, pls 28, 29, 44; Ryder, *West Yorkshire*, pp. 13, 43, 47.

¹⁴ P. Farman, P. Hacker, S. Badham, and P. Ryder, ‘Incised Slab Discoveries at Tickhill, Yorkshire’, *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, 17 (2008), 521–49.

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The ambiguity inherent in trying to categorise incised slabs is illustrative of the sheer variety in medieval commemorative form, and the difficulty in attempting to impose strict classifications. To maintain clarity, in this paper 'incised slabs' will refer solely to the large, late, elaborate monuments which have either effigies or no cross. These monuments are very rare in the North Riding of Yorkshire, undoubtedly due to its distance from the main production centres, and the few examples that are known (e.g. Middleham/Jervaulx Abbey, Yarm) have not been included for the purposes of this study (Pl. 1).

Dates and Locations

Cross slabs were used in a variety of locations, including cathedrals, monasteries, hospitals, and castles, but the vast majority are associated with burial in parochial churches and chapels. They were in use throughout England between the later eleventh century and c.1600, and they are present in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales as well, although their origins in these regions seem to be later.¹⁵ Cross slabs are primarily a product of the post-Conquest period, although there is no doubt that they were at times directly influenced by the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian sculptured grave markers which preceded them. In the north, they can be considered part of an overarching stone sculpture tradition that spans the Conquest.¹⁶ The northern counties feature examples of unusual 'transitional' monuments encompassing both pre- and post-Conquest motifs and forms, and Jim Lang has demonstrated clear links between hogback stones and coped twelfth-century cross slabs in the Tees Valley.¹⁷ Even at the large twelfth-century cross slab workshop of Barnack (Cambridgeshire), where the Anglo-Saxon monumental tradition was not as strong as in the north, there is evidence of pre-Conquest influence. The characteristic double-omega feature of Barnack cross slabs appears to derive from a pre-Norman motif.¹⁸ Although cross slabs only appeared in force after the Nor-

¹⁵ B. Gittos and M. Gittos, 'Irish Purbeck: Recently Identified Purbeck Marble Monuments in Ireland', *Church Monuments*, 13 (1998), pp. 5–14; C. A. Gresham, *Medieval Stone Carving in North Wales: Sepulchral Slabs and Effigies of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Cardiff, 1968); D. Maher, *Medieval Grave Slabs of County Tipperary, 1200–1600 AD*, BAR British Series, 262 (Oxford, 1997); J. W. Rodger, 'The Stone Cross Slabs of South Wales and Monmouthshire', *Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society*, 94 (1911), pp. 24–64; S. Tarlow, 'Reformation and Transformation: What Happened to Catholic Things in a Protestant World?', in D. Gaimster and R. Gilchrist (eds), *The Archaeology of Reformation, 1480–1580* (Leeds, 2003), pp. 108–21, at p. 113.

¹⁶ McClain, 'Medieval Cross Slabs', p. 186.

¹⁷ J. T. Lang, 'Some Early Medieval Coped Grave Covers in County Durham', *Transactions of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland*, 3 (1974), pp. 101–6, at p. 105.

¹⁸ L. A. S. Butler, 'Medieval Gravestones of Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, and the Soke of Peterborough', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 50 (1957), pp. 89–100, at p. 90.

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man Conquest, they were by no means a foreign importation, or an artistic tradition that arrived in England fully formed. More work needs to be done to fully explore Continental commemorative forms, but it seems that the monuments and motifs that developed in England were very much the product of an Anglo-Norman milieu.

From the surveys that have been carried out, in all areas of England cross slab use declined sharply in the fifteenth century, and they generally fell out of use completely after the Reformation, although post-medieval persistence is occasionally encountered in the north.¹⁹ For example, in Northumberland there are four examples with inscriptions dating as late as the 1630s.²⁰ Specific peaks and valleys of production seem to vary widely depending on the region of the country. In some areas, the late-medieval decline in use occurred much more rapidly. Cross slabs in Norfolk were all but replaced by brasses after the mid fourteenth century, for example. This more prestigious monumental form seems to have been fairly widely available in East Anglia from an early date, perhaps because the region's waterways expedited the delivery of brasses from workshops in London and the Continent.²¹ In the Cambridgeshire region, the shift of the Purbeck marblers to brass production and a recession in the Barnack quarries caused a similar fourteenth-century decline in cross slab provision. However, unlike Norfolk, which had no suitable freestone of its own, the rich stone resources of the Soke of Peterborough enabled small-scale Cambridgeshire masons to fill part of the void created by the loss of the major workshops.²²

In stark contrast, in northern areas cross slabs seem to have retained considerable social currency in the later Middle Ages, even after the introduction of alternate forms of commemoration. In the north, cross slabs not only coexisted as a viable monumental option alongside effigies, tomb chests, incised slabs, and brasses, but in many cases were still the dominant monumental form in the region. The table of statistics derived from available county studies clearly illustrates this north-south dichotomy (Fig. 1). From Nottinghamshire northward, nearly half of all churches contain at least one medieval cross slab, and there are on average over three slabs per site. In Durham a remarkable 81% of medieval churches still feature cross slabs, and the mean density in Northumberland is over eight slabs per

¹⁹ P. F. Ryder, *Cross Slab Grave Stones in West Yorkshire* (Wakefield, 1991), p. 5.

²⁰ P. F. Ryder, 'Medieval Cross Slab Grave Covers in Northumberland, 1: South West Northumberland', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th series, 28 (2000), pp. 51–110, at p. 60; P. F. Ryder, 'Medieval Cross Slab Grave Covers in Northumberland, 2: Newcastle and South East Northumberland', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th series, 30 (2002), pp. 75–137, at p. 82; P. F. Ryder, 'Medieval Cross Slab Grave Covers in Northumberland 3: North Northumberland', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th series, 32 (2003), pp. 91–136, at p. 101.

²¹ J. Finch, 'Commemorating Change: an Archaeological Interpretation of Monuments in Norfolk before 1400', *Church Archaeology*, 4 (2000), pp. 27–41, at p. 28.

²² Butler, 'Medieval gravestones', pp. 94–96.

	Sites with slabs	Total no. slabs	Avg. slabs/site	Source
Northumberland	87 (64%)	730	8.4	Ryder 2000–03
Durham	75 (81%)	550	7.3	Ryder 1985
Cumbria	118 (69%)	526	4.5	Ryder 2005
N. Riding Yorks.	138 (54%)	703	5.1	McClain 2007
W. Yorkshire	49 (45%)	185	3.8	Ryder 1991
E. Riding Yorks.	41 (22%)	153	3.7	Gittos and Gittos 1989, Morris 1906
Nottinghamshire	86 (40%)	272	3.2	Butler 1964
Leicestershire	47 (15%)	87	1.8	Butler 1964
Rutland	16 (32%)	36	2.3	Butler 1957
Cambs / Hunts.	97 (40%)	221	2.2	Butler 1957
Bedfordshire	32 (25%)	85	2.6	Butler 1987
Herefordshire	25 (18%)	30	1.2	Butler 1987
Norfolk (part)	25 (25%)	54	2.2	Finch 2000

Fig. 1: Comparison of county cross slab surveys.

site. In these areas, cross slabs were surely once a feature of every church and churchyard. In southern areas of the country, it is far less certain that this was the case. The East Riding of Yorkshire appears to deviate slightly from the northern norm, and certainly has the fewest slabs of any of the Ridings. The relative lack of freestone in eastern Yorkshire may well have had an influence on commemoration in the region, but as no full catalogue has yet been published for the East Riding, further work needs to be done to clarify the spatial and chronological patterns of provision of cross slabs in that part of the county.²³ In most of the Midlands and south east, cross slab numbers are consistently lower. Only Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire challenge the general trend, although this might be explained by the prodigious but chronologically limited production of the Barnack workshop in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

It is tempting to chalk up the striking provision of cross slabs in northern counties to a regional ‘fashion’, but that would imply a deliberate region-wide consciousness, and suggests the existence of a deep-seated affinity between locations as far apart geographically and politically as Nottinghamshire and Northumberland. It is important to emphasise that this ‘fashion’ was not a fortuitous, monolithic occurrence, but the result of consistent and deliberate choices over a very long period of time, which were bound up with far more complex and perhaps quite specific religious, economic, cultural, and political issues that underpinned the commemorative strategies of patrons. The remarkable prevalence and duration of cross slab use in northern areas is a real pattern, but our explanations should move beyond traditional, generalising frameworks. It demands more thorough analysis, so that we may better elucidate the relationship between monumental provision and particular geographical and social contexts.

²³ Badham and Blacker, *Northern Rock*, p. 16.

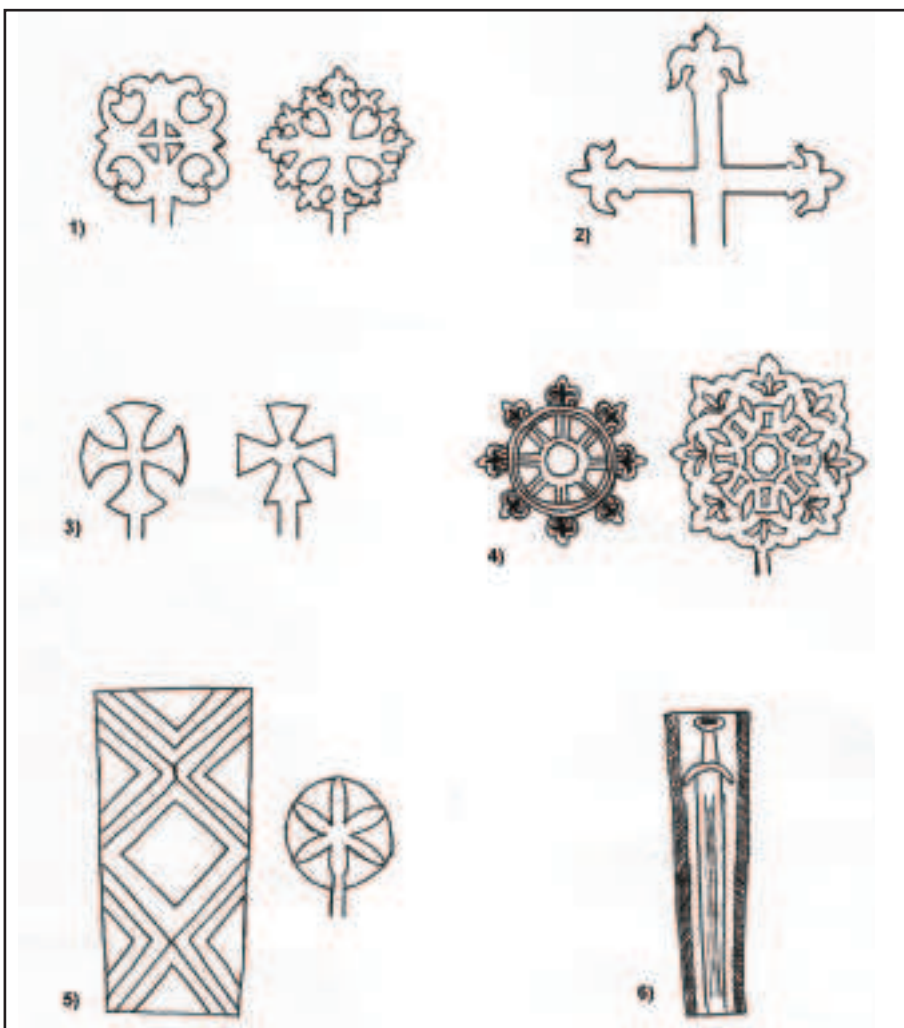


Fig. 2: Basic cross slab head styles: (1) bracelet and bracelet-derivative crosses; (2) straight-arm crosses; (3) splayed-arm crosses; (4) wheel-head and interlaced-diamond crosses; (5) geometric patterns and crosses; (6) emblem-only slabs (Illustration: Aleksandra McClain, after Peter Ryder).

Styles, Motifs and Emblems

Cross slabs exhibit a great range of form, design, and detail, and they vary both regionally and chronologically. Nevertheless, general stylistic trends and basic patterns are traceable, particularly in the styles of cross heads. There are a number of standard cross designs which occur in all parts of the country, including straight-arm crosses, bracelet and bracelet-derivative crosses, expanded-arm crosses, and wheel crosses (Fig. 2). Although the majority of cross slabs can be broadly placed in one of these categories, the range of variation and idiosyncrasy within the styles is remarkable. The consistency of certain stylistic features throughout the coun-

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try, such as the late-twelfth- and thirteenth-century 'round-leaf bracelet', indicates that standard copy books or templates must have been available in many cases.²⁴ However, the great number of individualistic variations on these widespread motifs, as well as the many examples of crudely carved attempts to emulate well-known styles, indicate extensive local and provincial modes of production.

The most common style from the late twelfth century onward is the 'bracelet' cross and its derivatives, which became ever more ornate and floriated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In its simplest form the bracelet cross features four broken circles forming a stylised cross head with expanded terminals and curved armpits. Yet by the late thirteenth century, this design could consist of as many as eight bracelets in a single cross head, and the cross terminals, bracelet ends, and even at times the cross shafts were elaborated with foliate motifs. The practice of overlapping or interlocking pseudo-bracelet shapes into a complex pattern eventually formed an entirely separate stylistic category in the late thirteenth century: the interlaced diamond cross. Conventional and decorated straight-armed crosses are also prevalent throughout all periods in which cross slabs were in use, although in their simplest forms they are most commonly associated with the eleventh and twelfth centuries, or the late fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries.

From the twelfth century onward, a distinctive feature of many grave slabs is the presence of one or more carved emblems supplementing, or sometimes replacing, the central cross. The emblems are generally agreed to be signifiers of a chosen identity or attribute of the commemorated person, be it in terms of occupation, rank, or gender. They too are a particular feature of the counties of northern England, where as many as one-third to more than three-quarters of cross slabs have them. Further south, however, the numbers decline dramatically. Nottinghamshire has forty-seven slabs with emblems, but Leicestershire, Rutland, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, and Bedfordshire have only between one and three slabs with emblems in their total provision, and Hertfordshire has none at all.²⁵ It has been suggested that localised, small-scale production, which was more common in northern regions, allowed for greater specification and personalisation of the monuments, and thus the proliferation of emblems.²⁶ This hypothesis is supported by Lawrence Butler's East Midlands survey, where only a few slabs from the large Barnack or Purbeck workshops featured an emblem, and those appear to have been added after delivery, carved in a different style and hand.²⁷

²⁴ P. F. Ryder, *The Medieval Cross Slab Grave Covers in Cumbria* (Oxford, 2005), p. 13.

²⁵ L. A. S. Butler 'Symbols on Medieval Memorials', *Archaeological Journal* (hereafter *Arch. J.*), 144 (1987), pp. 246–55, at p. 247.

²⁶ Ryder, *West Yorkshire*, p. 61.

²⁷ L. A. S. Butler, 'Minor Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the East Midlands', *Arch. J.*, 121 (1964), pp. 111–53, at p. 134.

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The range of emblems featured on slabs varies considerably, but the most common are swords, shears, chalices, books, and various trade or tool symbols.²⁸ Swords, which are generally thought to represent men of some social standing, far outnumber other emblems, sometimes by as many as two to one. In the early centuries of cross slab use, the use of the sword emblem may have been more effectively socially restricted to the knightly and lordly classes, but this was not the case throughout the medieval period. From the thirteenth century onward, trade emblems sometimes appear alongside swords, such as examples with blacksmith's or carpenter's tools, and in County Durham even with the apparently 'low-status' emblem of a plough-share.²⁹ The number of monuments and the range of emblems indicate that cross slab use by the late-medieval period was widespread, but they did not become a commoner's monument, as has sometimes been argued.³⁰ For instance, full excavations of medieval churchyards have demonstrated that the vast majority of burials would not have been marked by any stone, much less a carved grave slab.³¹ The cross slab evidence demands that we reconsider the complexity of the manorial hierarchy, the degree of social mobility that was accessible to relatively wealthy tradesmen and labourers, and the assumption that an identity associated with agriculture must necessarily be that of the lower 'peasant' classes. By the later Middle Ages, wealthy farmers could possess significant amounts of land and expendable cash, would have hired labourers to work under them, and would undoubtedly have been a force in the local community.³²

The emblems of chalices, books, patens, and croziers are indicative of priests, abbots, or other clergymen, and excavated finds of lead and pewter eucharistic vessels included with the bodies of ecclesiastics demonstrates that the carved emblems on the slabs may in some cases have been representations of actual grave goods.³³ Although their meaning has long been debated, the very prevalent shears and the far less common keys seem to be the emblems of women. Strong evidence now aligns with the view of shears representing female burials: they are often present opposite sword emblems on double-cross slabs, probably indicating a husband and wife, and when they are accompanied by inscriptions the

²⁸ Ryder, *West Yorkshire*, p. 61.

²⁹ P. F. Ryder, *The Medieval Cross Slab Grave Cover in County Durham* (Durham, 1985), pl. 45.

³⁰ C. Platt, *The Parish Churches of Medieval England* (London, 1995), p. 44.

³¹ J. D. Dawes and J. R. Magilton, *The Cemetery of St Helen-on-the-Walls, Aldwark*, *The Archaeology of York*, 12/1 (London, 1980), p. 16; G. Stroud and R. L. Kemp, *Cemeteries of the Church and Priory of St. Andrew, Fisbergate*, *The Archaeology of York*, 12/2 (York, 1993), p. 153; S. Mays, C. Harding and C. Heighway, *Wharram, a Study of Settlement on the Yorkshire Wolds, Vol. XI: the Churchyard* (York, 2007), pp. 271–94.

³² J. Bolton, "The World Upside Down". Plague as an Agent of Economic and Social Change', in M. Ormrod and P. Lindley (eds), *The Black Death in England* (Stamford, 1996), pp. 17–78, at p. 47.

³³ D. M. Hadley, *Death in Medieval England* (Stroud, 2001), p. 115.

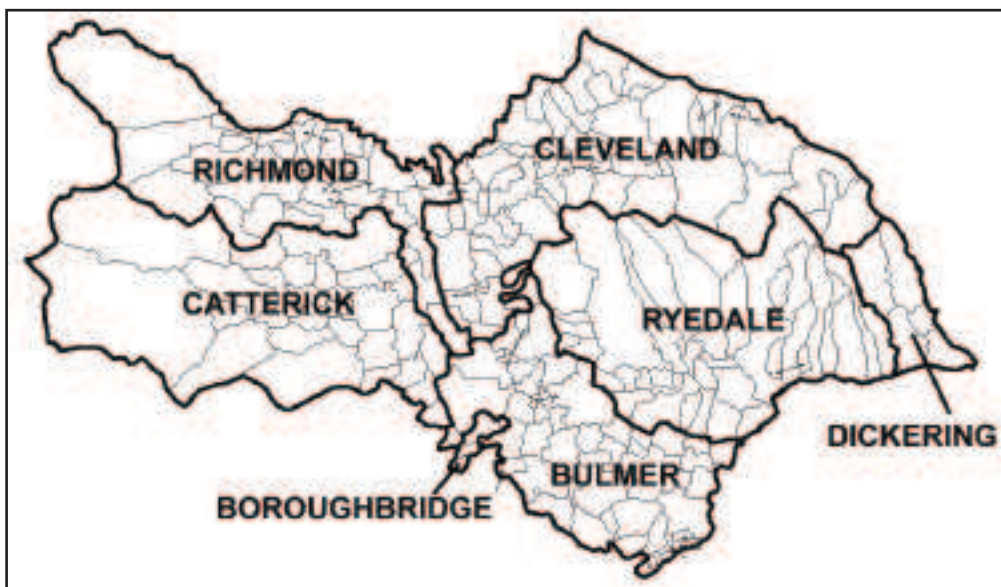


Fig. 3: Deaneries of the North Riding of Yorkshire (illustration: Aleksandra McClain).

text invariably names women. These symbols may have their origins in the common tools of the medieval housewife, but the reason behind the shears' emergence as the standardised element representing the feminine gender is somewhat obscure.³⁴

Trade and occupation emblems are not uncommon, particularly in the north, but they occur on many fewer slabs than swords, shears, and priestly symbols. They also seem to enter the vocabulary of cross slab iconography later than other emblems, being associated with monuments of thirteenth-century date or later. A variety of occupations are represented, including most commonly blacksmiths, masons, and huntsmen or foresters. Although secondary emblems do not appear on all cross slabs, they are of particular interpretative value as they not only give us a firmer idea of who the patrons of cross slabs were, but also allow a glimpse into the personal identities which the commemorated patrons and their surviving families thought it valuable to enshrine in a permanent medium. They also demonstrate the closely intertwined nature of medieval secular and religious identities, even for those below the levels of the nobility. Indeed, the fact that some grave slabs featured secular emblems without a cross at all indicates that the social necessity or benefit of projecting secular identity through commemoration may at times have taken precedence over the spiritual symbolism and function of the monument.

³⁴ Ryder, *Cumbria*, p. 18.

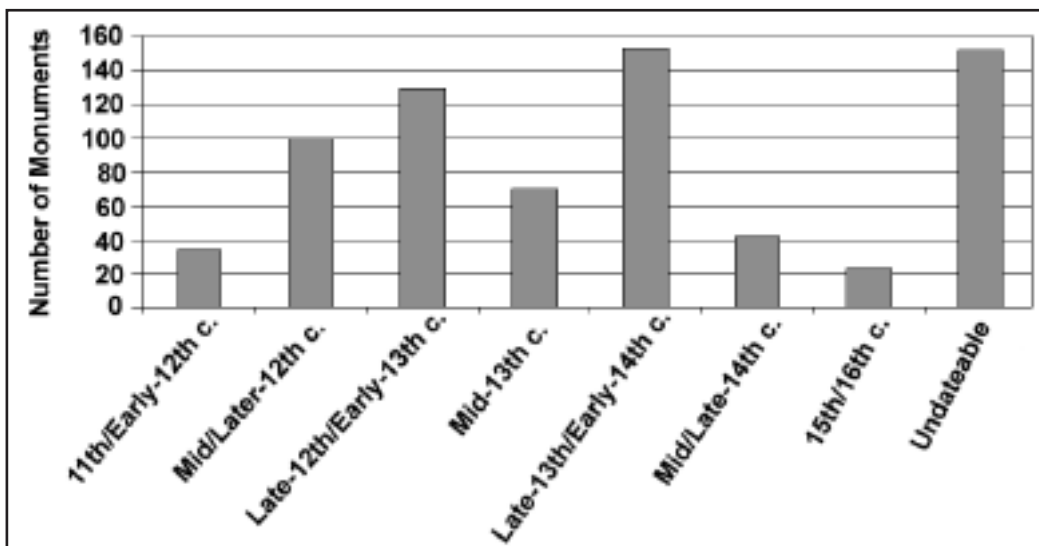


Fig. 4: Chronology of medieval cross slab production in the North Riding of Yorkshire (illustration: Aleksandra McClain).

Fourteenth-Century Cross Slabs in North Yorkshire

The North Riding of Yorkshire has 254 medieval parish churches and chapels, and 138 of these sites feature cross slabs. A total of 703 grave slabs, dating from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries, have so far been found.³⁵ This section will examine those cross slabs produced in the 'long' fourteenth century, from c.1275 to c.1400, and compare their numerical and spatial distributions with the earlier and later monumental production in the Riding, as well as with monuments of the period in the other northern counties. Much of the analysis will be broken down into rural deaneries, of which there are five entirely and two partially in the North Riding. They have been chosen as analytical groups as they represent fairly even and manageable numbers of parishes, and encompass distinct geographical regions (Fig. 3). For the purposes of analysis, the two churches in Boroughbridge deanery have been joined with those in Bulmer, and the eight in Dickering have been joined with Ryedale.

Numerical and Spatial Distribution

As can be seen from the chronological distribution graph of medieval cross slabs in the North Riding, the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries represent the peak of monument production in the region, although the thirteenth century as a whole is the period with the highest overall rates of provision (Fig. 4). Every deanery in the Riding apart from Ryedale, which reached its peak in the early thirteenth century, produced the majority of its cross slabs from c.1275–1325. The apparent decline in monument production in the mid thirteenth century is likely

³⁵ McClain, 'Medieval Cross Slabs', p. 162.

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to be due to the vagaries inherent in stylistic dating, which is required due to the *ex situ* nature of most cross slabs. Stylistic conservatism is evident in cross slabs throughout Yorkshire and the north, especially in the persistence of the simplest bracelet styles, and may well explain the anomaly.³⁶ Unless otherwise diagnostic features are present on the monument, such as fleur-de-lis or ogee arches, bracelet crosses of later periods might be almost indistinguishable from those of c.1200. It is very likely that some of the monuments assigned to the late twelfth/early thirteenth century category actually date to later in the century, and production in the thirteenth century probably remained fairly even until an upturn c.1300.

In contrast, the sharp drop in provision after the early fourteenth century seems more likely to be a genuine pattern, given the overall trend of falling production. As noted above with bracelet crosses, it is likely that the styles popular in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries persisted for some time, and the discrepancy between the early and later periods of the fourteenth century is probably not so pronounced as it appears on the graph. Nevertheless, it seems that the production and consumption of North Riding cross slabs began a late-medieval decline after c.1350. As shall be discussed in more detail below, this is not a trend isolated to the North Riding, but one that is seen across the northern counties, although it differs in intensity depending on the area. By the end of the late-medieval period, cross slabs are extremely scarce in the Riding, with only twenty-three of the 703 monuments (3%) dating to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The fact that nearly a quarter of the North Riding's cross slabs (152/703, 22%) are undateable is unfortunate, but the highly fragmentary nature of many surviving monuments often results in the loss of diagnostic features. Given the evidence from the Riding as a whole, it is probable that the majority of these monuments originated in the period from c.1150 to c.1350, and even if they had been more specifically dateable, they are unlikely to drastically shift the overall proportions of commemoration illustrated here.

In the North Riding, there are 189 cross slabs which date from c.1275 to c.1400, and they appear at seventy-five separate church sites (Figs 5–6). Of those 138 churches in the Riding which have a cross slab, just over half feature a monument that was produced in the fourteenth century. Despite the lower provision overall in comparison with production in the thirteenth century, fourteenth-century monuments are still found in all parts of the North Riding, and there are some areas where they are heavily concentrated, particularly the deaneries of Richmond and Cleveland. As can be seen on the map, the vast majority of the North Riding sites (76%) have between one and three fourteenth-century monuments,

³⁶ B. Gittos and M. Gittos, 'A Survey of East Riding Sepulchral Monuments before 1500', in C. Wilson (ed.), *Medieval Art and Architecture in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions, 9 (Leeds, 1989), pp. 91–108, at p. 93.

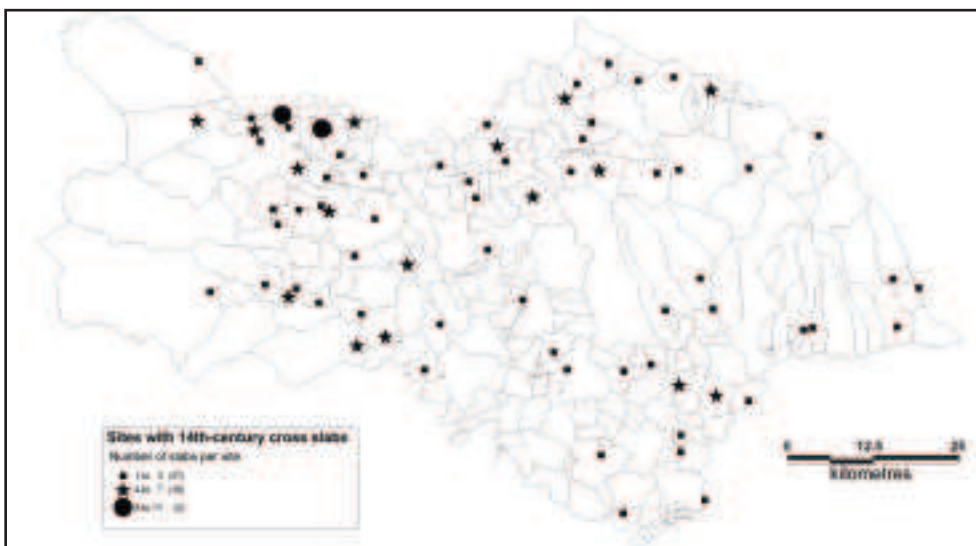


Fig. 5: Map of fourteenth-century cross slabs in the North Riding of Yorkshire (189 monuments at 75 churches) (illustration: Aleksandra McClain).

	No. of 14th-c. cross slabs	No. of churches with 14th-c. slabs	Avg. density of slabs/site
Bulmer / Boroughbridge	11	8 (14%)	1.38
Catterick	37	15 (38%)	2.47
Cleveland	53	21 (31%)	2.52
Richmond	62	18 (47%)	3.44
Ryedale/Dickering	26	13 (25%)	2.00
N. Riding	189	75 (100%)	2.52

Fig. 6: Table of fourteenth-century cross slabs in the North Riding, by deanery.

although fifteen churches (20%) have between four and seven monuments, and two have even more than that. All of the churches that feature more than three monuments, except for the Ryedale parishes of Amotherby (four slabs) and Slingsby (five), are in Richmond, Cleveland, and Catterick deaneries. The two highest single provisions are found in the neighbouring Richmond churches of Wycliffe and Forcett, which have eight and eleven monuments, respectively. As a whole, the deaneries of Ryedale/Dickering and Bulmer/Boroughbridge have not only fewer sites with fourteenth-century cross slabs, but far fewer monuments as well as a lower average density of slabs per site.

This pattern is replicated in the number of churches with only a single fourteenth-century cross slab. In both Bulmer (63%) and Ryedale (54%), over half of the sites have only one slab of the period. In comparison, only five sites in Catterick (33%) and five in Richmond (28%) have a single monument dating to the period. Unusually, Cleveland has the highest number of sites with fourteenth-cen-

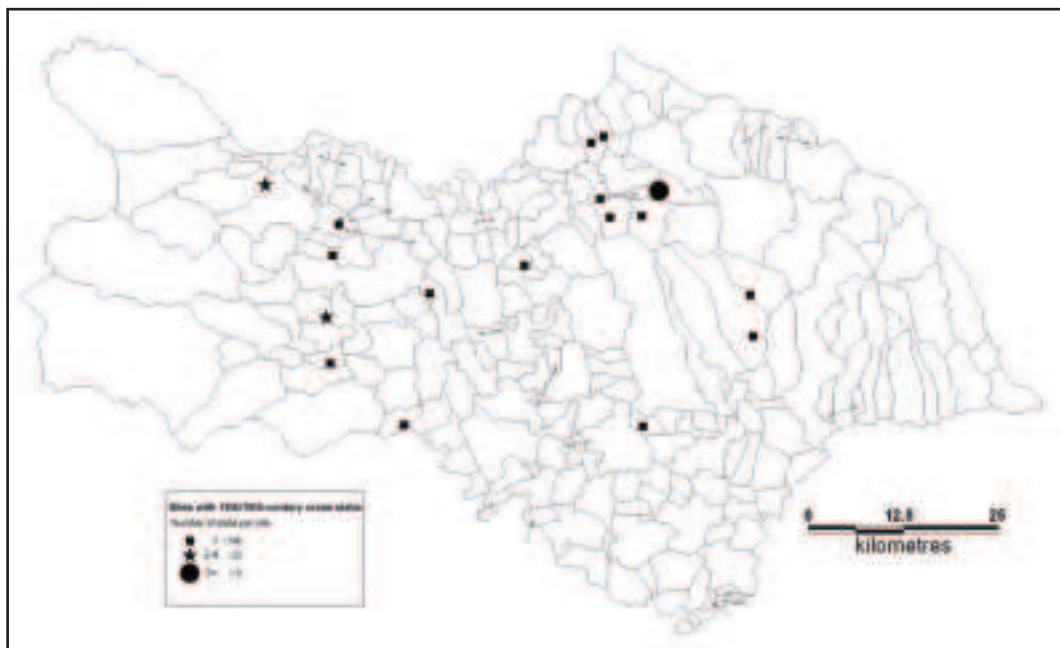


Fig. 7: Map of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century cross slabs in the North Riding of Yorkshire (23 monuments at 17 churches) (illustration: Aleksandra McClain).

tury monuments, and the second-highest average density, but also nearly half of its sites (48%) have only one fourteenth-century cross slab. In northern and western regions of the North Riding, particularly Richmond, it is clear that the fourteenth-century monument industry was substantial, and that cross slabs were a popular, valued, and accessible monumental form. In Ryedale and Bulmer, however, while cross slabs were certainly available and in use over this period, they were not as common a mode of commemoration.

This geographical trend is even more pronounced if the monuments of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are considered (Fig. 7). The distribution pattern by this time is almost entirely concentrated in the north and west of the Riding, with only three Ryedale churches having monuments of this date. By the fifteenth century, no cross slabs at all were being produced in Bulmer, Boroughbridge, or Dickering deaneries. There was a great reduction not only in the geographical coverage of the monuments, but in the number of slabs that were being commissioned. Over the whole of the Riding, there are only twenty-three monuments at seventeen sites, and fourteen of these sites feature only one cross slab of the period. Of those with more, Barningham and Hauxwell each have two monuments, and Kildale has five. All of these multiple examples are idiosyncratic monument groups with no direct parallels elsewhere, which were almost certainly produced by very locally based carvers. Barningham has a pair of extremely large, tapering slabs with rounded corners, large edge mouldings, high-relief carving,

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and simple straight-armed crosses with bulging terminals. Hauxwell's pair are both small, late monuments with straight-armed crosses and inscribed initials; they possibly commemorate members of the Brough family, who held the manor of East Hauxwell in the sixteenth century.³⁷ At Kildale, four of the five slabs are a stylistically cohesive group of fifteenth-century monuments, all of which are likely to be for members of the Percy family, as indicated by heraldic devices on two of the slabs.

	Late 13th/early 14th c.	Mid/late 14th c.	15th/16th c.	Total slabs
Bulmer / Boroughbridge	10	1	0	11
Catterick	32	5	4	41
Cleveland	37	16	11	64
Richmond	48	14	5	67
Ryedale / Dickering	20	6	3	29
North Riding	147	42	23	212

Fig. 8: Chronological distribution of late-medieval cross slabs.

Fig. 8 enumerates the chronological distribution of late-medieval slabs across the various deaneries of the North Riding. The decline in cross slabs after the period of the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century is clear across all deaneries. By the later fourteenth century, there was around one-third of the monumental provision that there had been c.1300, and even in deaneries with strong concentrations of late-medieval monuments the provision had been halved. This amount was almost cut in half again during the fifteenth century. The geographical and chronological breakdowns of monument provision demonstrate that while high levels of late-medieval cross slab production were a feature of the North Riding as a whole in comparison with other counties, it was not a homogeneous practice across the Riding.

At least part of the explanation for the disparity in fourteenth-century monuments between deaneries may lie with the growth of the brass and sculptural monumental industry around York during this period.³⁸ The increased production of brasses and sculpted effigies in the area may have drawn the interest of patrons in nearby Bulmer, Boroughbridge, and Ryedale. Brasses are more prevalent in the central Vale of York and eastern Ryedale than in other parts of the North Riding, and the Vale of York was also one of the most agriculturally prosperous regions of the North Riding.³⁹ Thus, in addition to the greater availability of brasses and effigies, patrons may also have had more money to spend on them. In contrast, Cleve-

³⁷ Victoria County History, *The Victoria History of the County of York: North Riding*, 1 (London, 1914), pp. 246–47.

³⁸ Badham, 'Monumental Brasses', p. 165–66; Gittos and Gittos, 'East Riding', p. 96.

³⁹ Badham, *Brasses from the North East*, p. 14; I.S. Maxwell, 'Yorkshire: the North Riding', in H. C. Darby and I. S. Maxwell (eds), *Domesday Geography of Northern England* (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 85–163, at pp. 115, 121.

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land, Richmond, and Catterick all lay some distance from York, and access to the monumental workshops of the city would have been far less feasible for many patrons, resulting in a reliance on local production throughout the medieval period. Provincial carvers in these regions would have become a far more developed industry from early on in the Middle Ages, resulting in patrons who not only had easy access to a thriving local trade, but who had also developed a strong affinity for cross slabs, even when other, more prestigious monumental forms could be acquired.

Fourteenth-Century Cross Styles

The five main cross slab styles of the fourteenth century in the North Riding are enumerated in the table below, but the illustration of fourteenth-century slab examples demonstrates the extent to which variation was possible within those broad types (Figs 9 and 11). Variations on the straight-armed cross are the most common, with particularly common features being a simple Latin cross with fleur-de-lis or clustered foliate terminals, as well as the presence of cusps on the cross arms. The second most common type is the bracelet or bracelet-derivative cross, which featured on the vast majority of cross slabs throughout the thirteenth century. This type, while still prevalent, began to give way in the fourteenth century to variations like the wheel and interlaced-diamond crosses, as well as the straight-armed cross, which becomes almost the sole form used in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The extremely wide range of variation in the bracelet and straight-arm crosses in this period makes them difficult to group together, and there are no obvious stylistic 'schools' in the fourteenth-century sample.

The most distinctive styles of the fourteenth century in the North Riding are the wheel-head and interlaced-diamond head crosses. They are two related styles which were introduced in the late thirteenth century and used throughout the fourteenth century, and which form coherent stylistic groups and geographical distributions. They are scattered across twenty-three churches in the northern part of the study area in Richmond, Cleveland, and northern Catterick deaneries, but they are extremely concentrated in Richmond, in the northwest of the Riding (Fig. 10). Of the forty-five examples of these two types of cross slab, thirty are found in Richmond, and there is only one interlaced-diamond slab in Bulmer and one wheel-cross in Ryedale. In Richmond and Catterick, the concentration of this style is particularly strong: at twelve of the fifteen sites featuring these monument styles, there is more than one slab of either type. In contrast, at every site in Cleveland, Ryedale, and Bulmer, there is only one wheel or interlaced-diamond cross slab per church.

Within the regional grouping, there are a few examples of slab collections that are very similar, and which might be indicative of small workshop production. The very elaborate interlaced-diamond cross slabs found at the neighbouring Catterick and Richmond churches of Bolton-on-Swale, Scruton, Ellerton Priory, and



Fig. 9: Examples of North Riding cross slabs dating from c.1275 to c.1400. Clockwise from top left: (1) Kirby Ravensworth 9, interlaced diamond cross with fan terminals; (2) Kirby Ravensworth 31, cusped straight-armed cross, forester/ huntsman emblems; (3) Ormesby 10, bracelet-derivative cross with oak-leaf terminals; (4) Hudswell 2, 8-arm wheel cross with linking circle and fleur-de-lis terminals, fleur-de-lis shaft sprigs, ogee base, sword emblem; (5) Allerston 2, bracelet derivative with round-leaf terminals, ogee base; (6) Forcett 4, 8-arm wheel cross in incised circle with fleur-de-lis terminals, shears emblem; (7) Melsonby 1, semi-effigial slab with saltire cross, stylized foliate terminals and shaft sprigs (illustrations: Peter Ryder).

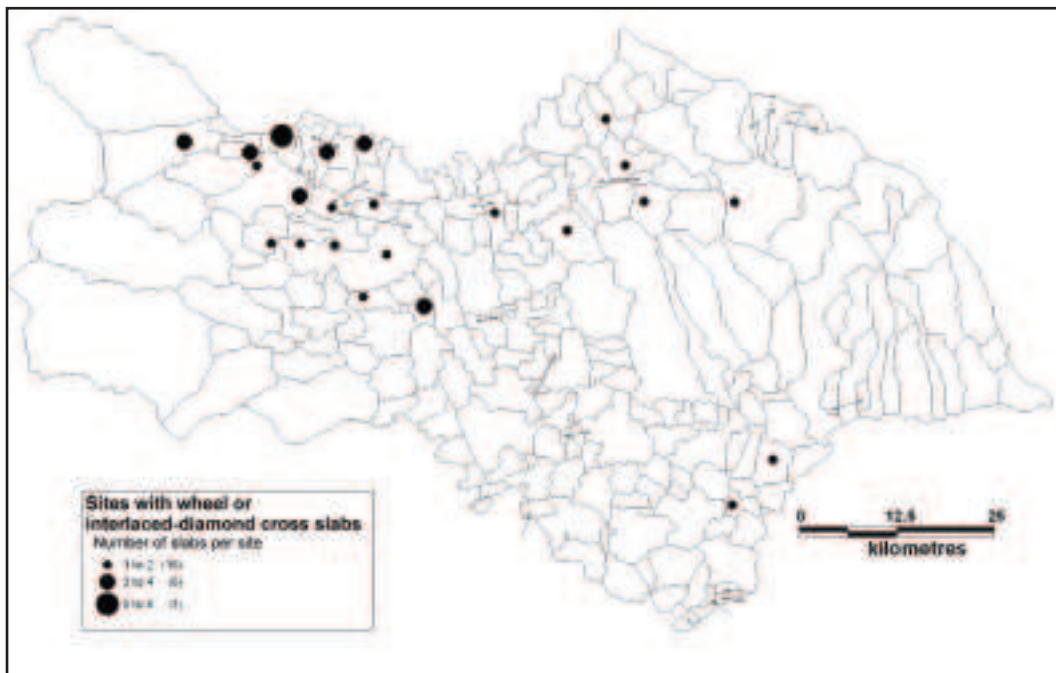


Fig. 10: Map of wheel-head and interlaced-diamond crosses in the North Riding (45 monuments at 23 churches) (illustration: Aleksandra McClain).

	Bracelet/ Derivative	Straight- Arm	Wheel Cross	Interlaced Diamond	Semi- Effigial	Other Diag. Features	Total Slabs
Bulmer / Boro'	3	5	0	1	0	2	11
Catterick	16	8	5	4	0	4	37
Cleveland	15	27	1	3	0	7	53
Richmond	4	18	15	15	2	8	62
Ryedale / Dick'	9	8	1	0	2	6	26
North Riding	47	66	22	23	4	27	189

Fig. 11: Distribution of cross slab styles in the fourteenth century.

Middleton Tyas are the most convincing example (Pl. 2).⁴⁰ They are all very similar monuments dating to the late thirteenth century, carved in fine high relief, with their most distinct feature being the elaborate foliage scrolls on either side of the cross shaft. The high quality of the carving on all the slabs suggests sculptors of particular proficiency, although the Middleton Tyas slab has somewhat stiffer foliage and a slightly more stilted and irregular vine scroll, which may indicate a painstaking copy by a less experienced mason.⁴¹ None of the other many interlaced-diamond monuments in the area are as fine as these, and the vine scroll

⁴⁰ P. F. Ryder, 'Four Medieval Cross Slabs from North Yorkshire', *YAJ*, 58 (1986), pp. 33–36, at p. 33.

⁴¹ Ryder, 'Four Medieval Cross Slabs', p. 35.

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motif does not feature on other North Riding examples, so the monuments are almost certainly related. These may mark the introduction of the interlaced-diamond type in the region, perhaps originating from Ellerton Priory, which would have had the means to support a small workshop of sculptors of considerable skill. The other, less accomplished examples might be later variations carried out by parochial sculptors, after the establishment of the style in the region.

A slightly more complicated example is the more wide-ranging group of 'Scruton-type' wheel crosses, which feature a head of six arms in a sunken panel, fleur-de-lis terminals, a linking wheel with an incised line, an incised cross arm below the head, and an incised shaft (Pl. 3). The highest concentration of these monuments are the three six-arm wheel crosses at Scruton, in Catterick, which are almost identical and must be by the same sculptor. There is also a pair of six-arm crosses at Wycliffe, in Richmond, which are almost identical to each other, and quite similar to the Scruton slabs, but with the addition of foliate sprigs on the cross shaft. There are more wide-ranging variations on the type at the Richmond parishes of Wycliffe, Kirby Ravensworth, and Marske, and there are eight-armed versions at Easby, Gilling West, and Hudswell. Unlike the interlaced-diamond examples discussed above, where very close stylistic connections are found on monuments at different, nearby sites, the multiple wheel crosses at each site are more similar to each other than to the examples at other churches. They may therefore be examples of parochial sculptors working in a well-known regional stylistic idiom, rather than a workshop or group of workshops producing a variety of wheel-cross monuments.

Although crosses that can be classified to the interlaced-diamond or wheel type appear outside Richmond and Catterick, they do not bear the same stylistic features, and they are very localised themselves. For example, the interlaced-diamond slabs at Appleton Wiske and Whorlton, two nearby parishes in Cleveland, are very similar to each other and were perhaps made by the same sculptor, but they bear almost no resemblance to the examples found in the northwest of the Riding, nor to the single interlaced-diamond example in Bulmer deanery. At first glance, the heavily concentrated northwestern distribution and outlying North Riding examples of both interlaced-diamond and wheel-cross types might seem to suggest a provincial workshop distributing these monuments at least across the region, and maybe throughout the county. However, a closer analysis of the stylistic groupings has demonstrated that there was certainly no single workshop working in the northwest, and even smaller production centres were probably extremely localised, working at the level of a single parish or several neighbouring parishes. Certainly, if there was 'workshop' production in the North Riding, it was far from the type we have come to know from the Barnack and Purbeck examples, where fairly standardised monuments were centrally produced and sent out widely throughout the region.

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Emblems

Secondary emblems are a relatively common occurrence on North Riding cross slabs, particularly from the thirteenth century onward, with 34% of slabs featuring them overall (Fig. 12).⁴² In the fourteenth century, of the 189 monuments of this date, a total of seventy-two (38%) have a secondary emblem of some sort. The table summarises the distribution of emblem types over the late-medieval period, as well as those slabs with emblems that are undateable. In the table, a cross slab can be counted more than once if it features emblems of more than one type. Therefore, a fifteenth-century monument with both a sword and shears, such as the double slab East Harlsey 1, appears once in the military emblems and once in the female emblems columns.

	Late 13th/ early 14th c.	Mid/late 14th c.	15th/16th centuries	Uncertain date	Total of emblem types
Military emblems	30	17	8	30	85
Female emblems	12	2	5	7	26
Priest emblems	7	2	6	6	21
Trade emblems	4	7	1	8	20
Crosses/roundels	2	0	2	0	4
Total emblems	55	28	22	51	156

Fig. 12: Distribution of late-medieval secondary emblems by date.

The overall trajectory of emblem frequency mirrors the prevalence of cross slabs across the late Middle Ages in the North Riding, with the peak coming in the period c.1300. Military emblems, particularly the sword, dominate all other emblem types in frequency throughout the late-medieval period, suggesting that men of at least minor elite status were the most frequently commemorated patrons of later-medieval cross slabs. Female, priest, and trade/occupation emblems are relatively even in distribution throughout the late-medieval period, but their chronological trajectory is interesting. All of the primary secular emblem types decline in use from the peak of c.1300, except for emblems of trade. Although they do not make up a large proportion of emblems, the increase in occupation emblems in the later fourteenth century, even as cross slabs themselves become less common, is noteworthy.

The trend certainly seems to reflect a rise in the fortunes of some members of the craft and trade classes, perhaps due to a change in their tenurial situation from bond service to cash payment, as is known to have happened in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁴³ Indeed, the crafts that are most often represented by

⁴² McClain, 'Medieval Cross Slabs', p. 177.

⁴³ P. D. A. Harvey, 'Non-Agrarian Activities in Twelfth-Century English Estate Surveys', in D. Williams (ed.), *England in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 1990), 100–11, at p. 111.

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cross slab emblems might indicate those trades that were particularly valuable to elite culture, and the tradesmen might have acquired elevated social standing in conjunction with any financial advancement. The combination of swords with trade emblem types on late-medieval monuments indicates that the symbols of the elite could be adopted by the non-knightly classes. Swords feature in combination with blacksmith's tools on Hutton Magna 1; with a hammer on Barningham 1; with forester's emblems on Romaldkirk 1, Bowes 6, and Kirby Ravensworth 31; and possibly with carpenter's tools on Marton-in-Cleveland 1 and Whorlton 13. The sword sometimes represented a strictly defined social rank, but could also signify a desirable ethos of status, especially as aspiration, emulation, and social mobility complicated the ranks of the high middle classes and lesser elite in the later Middle Ages.⁴⁴ Socially mobile tradesmen may have seen elite use of cross slabs as worthy of emulation, and, by demonstrating an understanding of higher-status modes of commemoration, they could use cross slab monuments to strengthen their family's newly attained position, or move closer to the ranks to which they aspired.

The appearance and rise of trade emblems on cross slabs suggests a widening of the strata of society who could commemorate in stone, and it has been argued that this necessitates a concomitant late-medieval devaluing of the cross slab form by elite patrons. In this scenario, cross slabs would no longer have been the arbiters of status that they had been in the past, when fewer elite monument types were available.⁴⁵ However, the consistent popularity of military emblems in the North Riding throughout the late Middle Ages can help to refine this idea. Even if some knightly patrons or manorial lords did move away from cross slabs towards more elite monuments, there was no abandonment of the form. Quite apart from the great number of sword emblems, there are examples of late-medieval cross slabs that explicitly commemorate members of the knightly class. They bear identifiable heraldry, as on East Harlsey 1, Liverton 1, Sockburn 2, and the Kildale group, or feature obviously knightly emblems, such as the horse head on Gilling East 2 and a glove and hawk on Barningham 1 (Pl. 4). It is clear that some of the gentry still viewed cross slabs as an appropriate and viable medium for expressing and maintaining this level of social status, and below this level it is certain that cross slabs remained an esteemed form of funerary patronage among the complex hierarchy of lesser landholders and middling elite.

Other Monumental Forms

In the late-medieval period, other monumental forms provided patrons with choices beyond the cross slabs which had become the standard funerary type in the region, but this availability did not result in a wholesale shift away from cross slab monuments. Although detailed published data is unavailable for Yorkshire, it

⁴⁴ Bolton, 'The World Upside Down', p. 47; J. A. Raftis, *Peasant Economic Development within the English Manorial System* (Stroud, 1996), p. 99.

⁴⁵ Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 38.

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is thought that some 240 medieval effigies survive for the whole of the county and York.⁴⁶ Undoubtedly some patrons shifted to brasses, but not in any great amount prior to the fifteenth century, and they did so more commonly in York and the East Riding than further north. Yorkshire as a whole features only thirty-seven brasses, letter fragments, indents, or known lost slabs dating prior to 1350, of which about half were found at monastic sites or at York Minster and Beverley Minster. The North Riding has only nine of these early brasses, of which three are related to monastic sites.⁴⁷ In all three Ridings of Yorkshire excluding the city of York, there are around 300 known medieval brasses, indents, and lost brasses dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as well as 115 undateable inscription indents, of which most are likely to be of the same period.⁴⁸ Comparatively, even an incomplete survey of Yorkshire cross slabs, which is missing almost all of the West Riding as well as the churches of the city of York, the Minster, and many religious houses, results in a comparable amount of over 300 cross slab monuments dating to these centuries.⁴⁹ In the city of York, however, the brass industry seems to have dominated the late-medieval monument market. Although there are only some forty brasses now surviving in the city, from antiquarian notes we know of 470 brasses that once existed, of which at least 250 were in York Minster alone.⁵⁰ Although the cross slab lost out to the prolific brass industry in urban areas, it is clear that in rural Yorkshire it remained a frequently used, highly valued, and influential commemorative form.

Comparisons with the Northern Counties

Even more so than Yorkshire, it appears that the other northern counties did not have a particularly rich tradition of high-status monuments to challenge the cross slab industry. If the extant brasses, indents, and records of lost brasses for the county of Durham are considered, there are only nineteen brasses dating to the fourteenth century, and a total of eighty-seven brasses that are likely to be medieval. Of these, the cathedral at Durham accounts for twenty-five monuments, and over half of the fourteenth-century ones. An additional eighteen inscription indents are undateable, but could be medieval.⁵¹ Even including all of the uncer-

⁴⁶ Badham and Blacker, *Northern Rock*, p. 22.

⁴⁷ J. Blair, 'English Monumental Brasses before 1350: Types, Patterns and Workshops', in J. Coales (ed.), *The Earliest English Brasses* (London, 1987), pp. 133–74, 180–215, at pp. 213–14.

⁴⁸ Badham and Blacker, *Northern Rock*, p. 30, with inscription indent data courtesy of Patrick Farman.

⁴⁹ Gittos and Gittos, 'East Riding Sepulchral Monuments'; McClain, 'Medieval Cross Slabs'; Ryder, *West Yorkshire*.

⁵⁰ Badham and Blacker, *Northern Rock*, p. 30, and from Sally Badham's unpublished work.

⁵¹ W. Lack, H. M. Stuchfield and P. Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of County Durham* (London, 2002).

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tain indents, there are just half as many late-medieval brasses as cross slabs in County Durham, and we cannot account for lost cross slabs as we are able to for some brasses. The far northern and western counties have even fewer brasses than Durham, and do not seem to have availed themselves of York workshop products in the same manner.⁵² Cumberland and Westmorland are the only other northern counties that have been fully surveyed for brasses, and respectively they have twenty-four and eight brasses or indents that are likely to be medieval. Cumberland has only two fourteenth-century brasses, while Westmorland has none at all.⁵³ Incomplete surveys of Northumberland and Lancashire indicate only five and two fourteenth-century brasses, respectively.

The lack of early brasses in the north is in stark contrast to the areas around the Thames Valley, East Anglia, and even as far north as Lincolnshire, where the provision of late-thirteenth- and fourteenth-century brasses was much more substantial.⁵⁴ Even considering the whole of the Middle Ages up to c.1550, the number of brasses in the north is comparatively low.⁵⁵ In Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland, effigies are far more common than brasses, and in County Durham there are nearly as many surviving effigies as lost and extant brasses (sixty-three to eighty-seven). Significantly, effigies in the region tend to be primarily of local character and stone, and there are only a few major monuments, such as the tombs of the earls of Westmorland at Staindrop and Brancepeth, and those at Durham Cathedral to commemorate the fifteenth-century bishops.⁵⁶ In these counties, even more so than Yorkshire, patrons heavily favoured cross slab monuments in the late Middle Ages, and even their more elite monuments were primarily locally produced.

The other counties of northern England bear similar patterns overall to the North Riding in terms of cross slab production and distribution, although there are some clear distinctions between the regions. Fig. 13 summarises the late-medieval monument provisions across the counties. The comparison demonstrates the persistence of cross slab use in the northern counties until the end of the Middle Ages, but a slowing in production after the fourteenth century is also visible across all areas, and in Durham and the North Riding it is particularly pronounced. These two are a remarkably similar pair in terms of fourteenth and fifteenth-century production and consumption, as are Cumbria (encompassing Cumberland and Westmorland) and Northumberland. The close relationship between Durham and the

⁵² Badham and Blacker, *Northern Rock*, p. 29; Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 43.

⁵³ W. Lack, H. M. Stuchfield and P. Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Cumberland and Westmorland* (London, 1998).

⁵⁴ Blair, 'English Monumental Brasses', p. 135.

⁵⁵ M. Stephenson, *A List of Monumental Brasses in the British Isles* (London, 1926), pp. 78–79, 392–93, 527–28; Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, *County Durham*; Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, *Cumberland and Westmorland*.

⁵⁶ Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 43.

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North Riding is even less surprising when the geographical distribution of the North Riding's fourteenth-century monuments is considered. The northern deaneries of Richmond and Cleveland, which border County Durham, are particularly strong in monument provision in the period, and the Tees Valley has been noted as a remarkably prolific area in terms of cross slab production.⁵⁷ The region is certainly the focus of the fourteenth-century production of interlaced-diamond and wheel-head cross types, which appear on thirty-six Durham slabs in addition to the forty-five found in the North Riding.

	Total no. of medieval slabs	14th-c. cross slabs	15th/16th-c. cross slabs	Total late-medieval cross slabs
Cumbria	536	90	33	123
Durham	550	179	14	193
Northumberland	730	94	39	133
N. Riding Yorks	703	189	23	212
W. Yorkshire	185	33	29	62

Fig. 13: Northern county comparisons

The drop in production in the fifteenth century is least apparent in West Yorkshire, perhaps because compared to the other northern counties the monument industry had already slowed considerably there by the fourteenth century. The number of slabs dating to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in West Yorkshire is nearly identical to those of the fourteenth century. This is partly due to the prevalence of late cross slab floor stones in the region, a characteristic the region seems to share with South Yorkshire. In comparison, there is only one such monument in County Durham and there are fewer than ten in the North Riding. Of those in West Yorkshire that can be dated precisely, the earliest is dated 1445, and a few date to the mid sixteenth century, so they are clearly a very late style.⁵⁸

The conspicuously high levels of cross slab production and consumption in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in West Yorkshire may be due to the flourishing of the textile trade in the region, which also resulted in a number of churches being comprehensively rebuilt in the fifteenth century.⁵⁹ This prosperity is in stark contrast to evidence from elsewhere in Yorkshire and the north, which suggests a marked recession during that time.⁶⁰ The economic downturn may have

⁵⁷ Ryder, *County Durham*, p. 13.

⁵⁸ Ryder, *West Yorkshire*, pp. 58, 60.

⁵⁹ P. F. Ryder, *Medieval Churches of West Yorkshire* (Wakefield, 1993), p. 57.

⁶⁰ J. Hatcher, *Plague, Population, and the English Economy 1348–1530* (London, 1977), p. 31; J. Hatcher, 'The Great Slump of the Mid-Fifteenth Century', in R. Britnell and J. Hatcher (eds), *Progress and Problems in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 237–72; A. J. Pollard, 'The Characteristics of the Fifteenth-Century North', in J. C. Appleby and P. Dalton (eds), *Government, Religion and Society in Northern England, 1000–1700* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 131–43.

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affected late-medieval cross slab patronage outside of western Yorkshire, especially of the floor slab monument type, which probably originated from workshops based at the magnesian limestone quarries, rather than parochial modes of production.⁶¹ Interestingly, the prevalent styles of the fourteenth century in the North Riding and Durham are not seen in West Yorkshire. There are only two wheel-head crosses in the county, and no instances of interlaced-diamond crosses.⁶² Both West and South Yorkshire appear to display a much closer relationship to the monument production and styles of the Midlands in this period than to their northern neighbours, with fewer cross slabs, but more availability of a range of other monuments, including alabaster incised slabs. The similar slowing of cross slab patronage in the East Riding after the thirteenth century indicates that its monumental industry may also have looked to more southern models in the late-medieval period, while the North Riding was decidedly part of the northern cohort.⁶³

Conclusions

It is debatable whether the lack of diversity in the commemorative market in the northern counties is primarily a cause or an effect of the region's remarkable cross slab industry. In his authoritative survey of medieval funerary monuments, Nigel Saul has very rightly pointed out the great number of practical factors that influenced commemorative choices, including the availability of materials, the accessibility of communication networks, particularly over water, and proximity to major production sites.⁶⁴ He argues that the dominance of the cross slab and the lack of variety in the northern monumental industry points primarily to the limited wealth in the region, and thus an inability to afford transport of elite monuments from the distant major workshops. Furthermore, he contends that continued use of the cross slab indicated a lack of sharp social differentiation in the region, and less interest or necessity in communicating status through commemorative patronage.⁶⁵

It is certain that the northern counties were less prosperous. Also, the wide availability of local stone, and the costs and difficulties of acquiring and transporting brasses and effigies, undoubtedly played a major role in the composition and character of the northern monument industry. These factors, for instance, are a very likely influence in the clear disparities in late-medieval cross slab commemoration between the south-eastern and north-western regions of the North Riding. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily follow that patronage of cross slabs indicates a lack of awareness or interest in hierarchy and status, or that these monuments were less effective in communicating and negotiating subtle social distinctions or

⁶¹ Ryder, *County Durham*, p. 5; Ryder, *West Yorkshire*, p. 58.

⁶² Ryder, *West Yorkshire*, pp. 32, 45.

⁶³ Saul, *English Church Monuments*, pp. 46–47.

⁶⁴ Saul, *English Church Monuments*, pp. 42–43.

⁶⁵ Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 44.

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personal and familial identities. This underestimates the complexity and diversity of the region, as well as the communicative power of the cross slab. The argument also reduces northern commemorative action to a primarily functional, economic choice, rather than one that held meaning for the patron and was structured and informed by his social milieu. Following a purely functional line of reasoning, we might equally assert that the patrons of Norfolk chose brasses solely because they could easily acquire them from London, as it was too expensive to import cross slabs from the production centres of the north.

The patrons of the northern counties actively perpetuated the cross slab industry, and the style, form, material, and location of the monuments held specific and deliberately chosen meanings for the commemorated person, their family, and the people of the parish and village. By the peak of production in the early fourteenth century, three hundred years of prolific cross slab commemoration meant that they had become part of the long-established and standardised vocabulary of memory, piety, and social display. They would have been a familiar and widely understood material presence in the local church and settlement, and thus had a resonance and efficacy in northern England that transcended the mere financial value or artistic accomplishment of the monument. In the north, a strong affiliation with the local – in terms of production, consumption, and the eventual choice of location and display – was a primary strength of the cross slab as a social agent, and undoubtedly part of its lasting appeal in the region. It is traditionally assumed that the most effective definitions of status were carried out on a supra-regional or national level, through the audiences available in cities, monasteries, and cathedrals, rather than on the local level to the audience of the parish, the manor, or the immediate district. This assumption has resulted in the marginalisation of cross slabs in academic discussions of commemoration and social significance. The national audience may have been necessary or desirable to members of the nobility, but it has also been recognised that the local sphere of influence was key even for national players, and it was absolutely essential to the construction of authority and social standing for manorial lords and the lesser lay and religious elite.⁶⁶

The later Middle Ages was a time of increasing importance of gentry and knights in the county community, as the minor lords holding localised estates and political offices grew in influence. These men were identified with their shire, and were listed county by county in several fourteenth-century documents.⁶⁷ The value of utilising the local sphere to establish social standing would not have been limited to the lordly classes, especially as traditional feudal ties weakened, and a

⁶⁶ C. Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages: the Fourteenth-Century Political Community* (London, 1987), p. 175.

⁶⁷ N. Saul, *Knights and Esquires: the Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 30, 260.

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degree of instability was injected into the late-medieval social ladder.⁶⁸ In these conditions, there was not only increased opportunity for advancement among the gentry classes, but also for those who may not have been members of the traditional elite, but who wielded power, wealth, or influence in the community. For these groups, cross slab monuments would have been one accessible and tangible means of displaying membership of the local elite, and physically reinforcing the patron's legacy in the community and the maintenance of his or her family's position.

The general lack of inscriptions on cross slabs is one stylistic choice that speaks volumes about their local audience, and the wide variety of social levels on which the monuments needed to function. In the North Riding, secondary emblems outnumber inscriptions by 234 to nineteen, demonstrating a deliberate choice to promote visual and symbolic modes of communicating identity over textual ones, thus ensuring that even illiterate strata of society could effectively engage with the monument. Cross slabs were not intended only as shows of social standing and identity for other members of the elite, but for the entire manorial community, from which the patrons drew their authority, wealth, and influence. This lack of inscriptions compared to emblems also suggests that, in some social spheres, symbols proclaiming membership of group identities could be more important than discrete identifiers such as inscribed names. Use of a name on a monument may even have been somewhat superfluous in the tight social circles of the village and parochial communities where cross slabs were generally commissioned and displayed.

To understand the true effectiveness of cross slabs as memorials, they must be considered in the context of the parish churches in which they were displayed, and in light of the significance of the geography of commemoration. The erection of a stone monument made a claim on place and space that was as important as the memorial itself. The case of Ralph Hamsterley, who in the early sixteenth century commissioned five brasses for himself, to be placed at each church with which he was affiliated, is an extreme but illustrative example of the value placed on establishing an association with specific churches and locations.⁶⁹ A family accumulating monuments in a church over time was a means of establishing a physical manifestation of lineage, and asserting social standing or power in the community.⁷⁰ In the northern milieu, cross slabs undoubtedly accomplished memorialisation and the vital claiming of place as effectively as more costly monuments. Indeed, they were perhaps even more effective at expressing ties to a manor, parish, or place, as they were created out of and imbued with the material

⁶⁸ Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, p. 104.

⁶⁹ Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 122.

⁷⁰ Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 136.

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resources, traditions, relationships, and social structures of the locality in which they stood.

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